

Focus on Vision Care

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired Miami-Dade

Eye Care for Miami-Dade County and Beyond

How have 85,000 low-income Florida schoolchildren who failed state-mandated vision screenings gotten a free comprehensive eye examination and prescription glasses? The answer is through the Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program, LLC, a division of Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired.



Essilor Vision Foundation has documented that 53% of children living in poverty have uncorrected vision problems that interfere with reading, writing, and classroom learning; 90% of children who need eyeglasses don't have them, and 74% of adjudicated adolescents have undetected vision problems. The goal of our Heiken Program is to assure that financially disadvantaged Florida schoolchildren have a better chance of succeeding in school and life by having access to a comprehensive eye exam and glasses.

During the 2013-2014 school year, 8,700 underserved children from across Florida received comprehensive eye exams, with 7,700 requiring and receiving prescription glasses at no cost to the families. Nearly 450 children were referred for medical follow up for conditions detected during the dilated eye exam. By leveraging Florida Department of Health (FDOH) funding with other sources, such as the Florida Optometry Eye Health Fund, the National Eye Institute, The Health Foundation of South Florida, The Children's Trust and others, the Program has been able to meet this phenomenal growth in the number of children served.

Eye care is provided on four mobile optometric units that travel to school sites throughout the state and by 2,000 Florida Optometric Physicians Network (FOPN) community optometrists offering access to offices statewide. Children who do not meet the criteria to receive services through the FDOH contract are not turned away; they receive services from an FOPN network provider.

One of the students is Kristy, a 6th grade student, whose note of gratitude explains the difference this program has made in her young life: "Thank you so, so much. Because of you, squinting is a thing of the past. Now I know what's on the board and my grades are the proof.... I hope this program will grow bigger and stronger so kids like me can see."

In addition to the Heiken Program for schoolchildren, Miami Lighthouse offers a full range of vision rehabilitation services and programs for blind and visually impaired babies, children, and adults; and seniors suffering from age-related vision loss that help them lead independent and productive lives.

Miami Lighthouse is a recipient of Florida Blue Foundation Build Healthy, Strong Communities grants, and was recently named a 2015 Sapphire Awards honoree.

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